



Research Report

IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN GHANA

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Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Civil Society Organisations in Ghana

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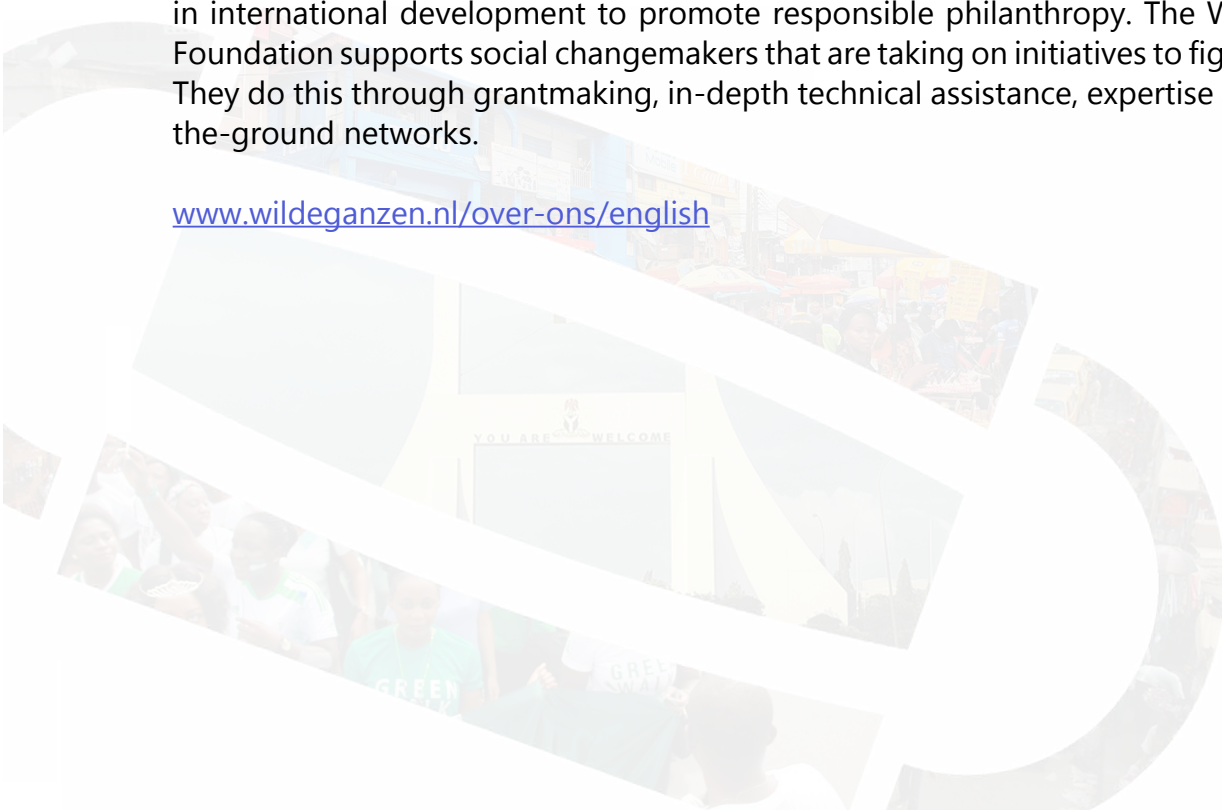
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LIST OF ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

CBOs	Community based Organisations
CDC	Centre for Disease Control
CHPS	Community-based Health Planning and Services
CIVICUS	World Alliance for Citizen Participation
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
CRP	COVID-19 Response Project
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DFID	Department for International Development
DSD	Department of Social Development
DSW	Department of Social Welfare
E.I.	Executive Instrument
ERP	Economic Recovery Programme
EU	European Union
FBOs	Faith-Based Organisations
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
IEC	Information Education and Communication
INGOs	International Non-governmental Organisations
MFWA	Media Foundation for West Africa
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
PPEs	Personal Protective Equipments
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
STAR-Ghana	Strengthening Transparency, Accountability and Responsiveness
UK	United Kingdom
UKAID	United Kingdom Agency for International Development
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Education Fund
USAID	United State Agency for International Development
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Association
WACPODIS	West Africa Policy Dialogue Series
WACSI	West Africa Civil Society Institute
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyses the impact of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic on civil society organisations (CSOs) in Ghana. It specifically explores the effect of the pandemic on CSOs' operations and programmes, funding and domestic resource mobilisation and their sustainability. It also analyses donor-CSO relations as well as CSOs' role and relationship with key stakeholders during the pandemic.

CSOs operate in an uncertain environment. The uncertainty in the environment has caused disruptive change which has led to the collapse of some organisations while others have been able to respond effectively. Resilient organisations are those which demonstrate ability to turn challenges into opportunities. The existing literature on CSOs and environmental uncertainty highlights how some CSOs all over the world have successfully adapted to external threats to their existence. However, the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting the operations of CSOs in Ghana and the manner in which these organisations are responding to the threats of the pandemic has received very little empirical attention and documentation.

This study aims to address this knowledge gap by examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operations of CSOs in Ghana with the hope of strengthening their capacities to become more resilient and responsive to future disruptions. The study draws on a mixed methods research design by combining both quantitative and qualitative data, analysis and interpretation.

The study began with a survey of 86 CSOs with the aim of having a general understanding of how CSOs in Ghana were being impacted by and were responding to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying challenges. The qualitative part of the study involved holding a focus group discussion (FGD) with nine (9) CSOs and five (5) key informants or experts to get detailed accounts of the peculiar experiences of CSOs during the pandemic and what the sector's response has been in Ghana.



The research findings show that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on CSOs in Ghana has been dramatic in the short term and is expected to have some medium to long-term effects on the civil society sector. The strategies implemented by the Government of Ghana to curb the spread of the virus placed restrictions on movement and large gatherings, amidst social distancing and other protocols. These interventions and response measures affected the operations and programmes of CSOs in the country. The CSOs could not effectively function from their offices nor engage with beneficiary communities.

The restrictions imposed some restraints on staff movement, reduced staff strength, led to the cancellation of meetings, conferences, and travels (both local and international), reduced and led to the cancellation of key operations. There was also the cessation of fieldwork and

community engagements, as well as the loss of funding to the CSOs. The funding landscape was also largely affected by the pandemic. Eighty-one (81%) of the CSOs reported delayed or reduced funding from donors, as well as funding restrictions and related constraints as key impacts of the pandemic on their organisational funding.

Even though the pandemic affected CSO-donor relations, the study found no widespread withdrawal of funding from donors. There were however, reports of reduced funding amounts and reallocation of available resources to COVID-19 related activities. Significantly, the study found that 49% of organisations were unlikely to continue to provide services to their beneficiaries if the present COVID-19 conditions and financial challenges persisted beyond September 2020.

As part of their strategic responses to the pandemic, the CSOs engaged in some collaborative work with other CSOs and the private sector but their collaboration with the government was found to be very limited. The findings suggest that Ghanaian CSOs strived to ensure that they remained relevant to key stakeholders including mainly their intended beneficiaries and donors. In particular, they continued to engage in advocacy and community education during the pandemic, collected data and engaged in information sharing, coordination of donations for the vulnerable and the provision of capacity building services to stakeholders and beneficiary communities.

The study recommends CSOs' representation in the development and implementation of all social intervention programmes, investment in research and documentation on the activities and impact of CSOs in Ghana, investment and capacity development in digital technology solutions, diversification of financial resources and enhancement of capacity for local resource mobilisation, resource pooling through alliance formation, and the enhancement of CSOs' image through social accountability.



INTRODUCTION





The World Health Organization (WHO) following the outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in 2019, declared the disease a pandemic on 11 March 2020. Following WHO's declaration, Africa was cited as a potential COVID-19 worse case continent (Oqubay, 2020; United Nations, 2020). WHO had warned earlier that COVID-19 could kill between 83,000 and 190,000 people across 47 African countries within the first year with a potential of "smouldering" for many more years (UN, 2020). For some reason, the continent has so far not lived to this billing. As of the time this study was being conducted in July 2020, Africa's COVID-19 case count stood at 770,421 confirmed cases with 13,234 deaths across the continent out of a global death toll of 668,910 (WHO, 2020a). Africa continues to account for a relatively low number of cases and deaths but has equally been under the ravaging effects of the disease (Sarfo, Ansah, & Amoah, 2020; Asante & Mills, 2020).

In the quest to curb the spread of the virus, governments have resorted to numerous measures. The measures have included curfews and lockdowns, travel restrictions, a ban on gatherings and other social distancing protocols. The consequences of these measures have equally been enormous. It has had impacts on all sectors of society-the economy, health, and general wellbeing (Sarfo, Ansah, & Amoah, 2020). In this, the social economy within which CSOs operate has also been impacted tremendously (Barnard & Maruru, 2020; Bell & Dubb, 2020).

While the spontaneous effect of COVID-19 is being felt by all CSOs across the globe, Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2020), CSOs in West Africa and Ghana in particular appear to be having their work impacted more dramatically (STAR-Ghana, 2020b). This is partly so because much of the work done in the region is supported by funding from external sources (Vandyck, 2020; Amoah, 2019; Kumi, 2017a; Kumi, 2017b). CSOs, especially smaller organisations in the global South are reported to be more affected by the COVID-19 pandemic because of their over-reliance on external resources, weak digital infrastructure, as well as inadequate knowledge and capacity to navigate the digital space without difficulties (STAR-Ghana, 2020b; Schwier & Holland, 2020).

Particularly, COVID-19 is taking a toll on grassroots organisations' operational engagement – the way they organise to carry on with their activities; and their programmatic engagements – how they reach out to beneficiaries and beneficiary communities to deliver on their mission and organisational objectives. This is happening within a context where external funding from long-term and potential donors is uncertain (LINC, 2020). In most countries, legal frameworks regulating CSOs' operations are either enhancing their ability to be agile and resilient at this time while providing appropriate responses to the pandemic, or, impeding their ability to play their roles as valuable actors that can support their governments to contain and flatten the COVID-19 curve (CIVICUS, 2020a).



The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many other organisations to adopt a work from home policy however, many small CSOs are struggling with this transition to working remotely. The struggle originates partly from inadequate practical knowledge in terms of the most suitable tools to adopt in these times. Also, there is a skills deficit on how to use suitable tools in cases where CSOs have access to these technological tools. A more critical challenge is evident as several CSOs in the region cannot afford available technological resources that can aide their work, especially amidst COVID-19 (WACSI, 2020b).

It became necessary to explore and document how, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, CSOs, especially community-based organisations (CBOs) in Ghana are surviving. This study therefore sought to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operations of CSOs in Ghana with a view to strengthen their capacities to become more resilient and responsive to future disruptive changes.

The study drew on a cross-sectional exploratory research using mixed methods by combining both qualitative and quantitative data, analysis, and interpretation. The study involved the administration of a survey questionnaire to 86 CSOs in Ghana with the view of understanding how CSOs in Ghana are being impacted by and are responding to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying challenges. The qualitative part of the study used focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant or expert interviews with nine (9) CSO representatives and five (5) experts respectively to get detailed accounts of the peculiar experiences of CSOs during the pandemic and what the sector's response has been in Ghana.

This report therefore presents a detailed account of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operations, programmes, and organisational sustainability of CSOs in Ghana. It also documents the sector's response to the challenges presented by the pandemic and charts new paths to building the resilience of CSOs to future disruptive changes. The knowledge shared in this research report is useful for governments, civil society actors and the community of CSO funders, as it provides empirical evidence for assessing the impact of the pandemic on the social economy and what the sector's response has been. The rest of the report is organised into five sections.

Following this introduction, Section 2 reviews the existing literature on COVID-19 as well as the CSO sector in Ghana. This is followed by the research methodology in Section 3. The next section presents and discusses the research findings. The last section of the report concludes by reflecting on the implications of the research findings.



2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW: CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION





2.1 Overview of the Civil Society Sector in Ghana

Civil society has common usage in Ghana. The term is used to refer to all organisations that are neither public (government) nor private and not for profit. The sector is often defined in the Ghanaian context to include registered and unregistered non-governmental or community-based organisations (Atuguba, 2015, p.83). According to Atuguba (2015), civil society includes but not limited to all registered charities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), advocacy groups, community-based organisations (CBOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs), professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, and many others.

The presence of Ghana's civil society sector predates the nation's independence struggle (Amoah, 2019). Before independence, CSOs were formed primarily with some public interest – the protection of the rights of the vulnerable and justice for the marginalised in society at the time (Tsikata, Gyekye-Jandoh & Hushie, 2013).

In the period immediately following the independence (1957-1970), attempts at building a unitary state devoid of divisions muted the activities of civil society until the return to parliamentary democracy in the 1990s (Tsikata et al., 2013). In the 1980s through to the late 1990s, a lot of changes happened locally and globally which affected the civil society sector differently. Ghana's socioeconomic and geopolitical state at the time spurred on a certain kind of civil society activism while silencing others. Indeed, the factors accounting for the rise of CSOs in Ghana are interlaced. The economic challenges of Ghana in the 1980s for example increased the emergence of service delivery NGOs who were working to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor in the country (Kumi, 2017b; Gary, 1996). Working at the district and community levels, these NGOs were of immense support to the state (Gary, 1996).

They provided basic amenities and social needs of the people at the local level. Around this time, the advocacy type of CSOs was less heard of. During the structural adjustment programme (SAP) and the economic recovery programme (ERP) in Ghana, the dynamics of CSOs' operations in the country changed. Gary (1996) for one refers to shift of aid from states to CSOs (Hutchful, 2002) as one dramatic occurrence which in itself introduced some struggle between the State and CSOs over declining aid resources.

Another factor affecting the state of civil society in Ghana had to do with the so called 'good governance agenda' which tended to emphasise democratisation of the Ghanaian political landscape (Kumi, 2017b; Atuguba, 2015; Tsikata et al., 2013). Indeed, following the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, and the end of the Soviet Union, there appeared a certain hunger for the activities of civil society organisations. This time saw a return to democratic rule in many developing countries after years of dictatorship. Ghana was one of those countries. Atuguba (2015) reports of a boom in CSO activities with several of them emerging in advocacy following the adoption of the 1992 constitution. The space of traditional (professional) CSOs has since grown and evolved up to what persists in Ghana presently.

The exact number of CSOs operating in Ghana remains a contentious subject as several reports quote different figures for various reasons (WACSI, 2015; Tsikata et al., 2013; Amoah, 2019). That notwithstanding, the organisations making up the population of organised civil society in Ghana are all registered and granted NGO status to operate by the Department of Social Development (DSD) formerly the Department of Social Welfare (DSW). Relying on data from the DSD, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) places the number of CSOs registered with the Department as at the end of 2018 at 7,950 (USAID, 2019, p.88). According to this data, Greater Accra, Central, Ashanti, Eastern, and Northern Regions have a high concentration of both rural and urban CSOs in the country (Amoah, 2019). It is important to note that the organisations making up the 7,950 do not represent an exhaustive list of all civil society organisations in the country. There is evidence of many more CSOs and other groups who for lack of registration with the DSW have not been granted NGO status and therefore not included in the DSD data referenced here.

Available evidence shows that many CSOs in Ghana operate in the area of education, women empowerment, governance, agriculture and youth development (Amoah, 2019; Kumi, 2017b). They function at the national,

regional, district, and community levels depending on the thematic focus. That notwithstanding, it is common to find advocacy and policy focussed CSOs operating from the national and regional levels and service delivery and humanitarian organisations at the districts and community level (Amoah, 2019; Gary, 1996).

Kumi (2017b) describes Ghana's CSO funding landscape as very complex and extremely donor dependent (Kumi, 2017b, p.67). The country has a liberal environment without government interference when it comes to funding sources for CSOs. While reference could be made to non-traditional donors in Ghana's CSO funding landscape, their presence has not had any significant impact on the existing structure of funding in the country. As Kumi (2017b) notes, nearly 90% of funding for CSOs in Ghana are external with only 10% raised domestically. In fact, for decades, CSOs- donor relationship in Ghana has been supply-led and extremely resource dependent (Kumi, 2017b). This scenario sparked interest in CSO financial sustainability concerns when donor priorities shifted following country's graduation to lower-middle-income status in 2010 (Arhin, et al., 2018). The emergence of the COVID-19 disease pandemic therefore heightens the concerns over CSO-donor relations and the funding environment which the present study sought to explore.

2.2 Brief Overview of the COVID-19 Pandemic (Global Outlook, National Outlook)

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) that spreads via saliva or discharge from the nose through coughing or sneezing from an infected person (WHO, 2020b). COVID-19 started from Wuhan China in late December and spread across the globe in a matter of weeks. Eventually, the disease was declared by WHO as a public health emergency of international concern on 30 January 2020 (Habib, 2020). Several guidelines were issued by WHO and Centre for Disease Control (CDC) and these guidelines are revised as and when data from various research are made available. However, the disease continues to ravage the entire world. By 11 August 2020, over 19.9 million COVID-19 cases had been confirmed, comprising more than 732,000 deaths (WHO, 2020c). As at the time this research was being conducted, there was no specific treatment or vaccine for COVID-19 yet (WHO, 2020c).



Across the globe, countries responded differently and implemented several control measures or strategies aimed at lessening the socio-economic impact and reducing active cases to zero. On 12 March 2020, Ghana recorded her first two cases of COVID-19 that were imported from other countries. The Government of Ghana in consultation with stakeholders from key sectors of the economy came out with preventive measures and strategies to contain the spread of the diseases. Five key objectives were set by the government to tackle the pandemic in Ghana which included controlling or stopping the importation of the virus; containing its spread; providing sufficient care for the sick; curbing the social and economic impact of the disease and lastly inspiring the expansion of its capability and extending its self-reliance (UNICEF-Ghana, 2020a).

The President of Ghana, Nana Addo Darkwa Akufo-Addo in his first address on 15 March 2020 following the confirmation COVID-19 in Ghana (Ministry of Health, 2020a), directed the Attorney-General to immediately submit to Parliament some emergency legislation in accordance with article 21(4) (c), (d) & (e) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana (Addadzi-Koom, 2020). Also, the Minister for Health was directed by the President to declare a public health emergency (Addadzi-Koom, 2020) pursuant to section 169 of the Public Health Act, 2012 (Act 851) to govern the relevant measures. This led to the introduction of the Imposition of Restrictions Act (Act 1012), assented to by the President. Following this, there was the Imposition of Restrictions (COVID-19) Instrument, 2020 (E.I. 64), all in a bid to institute measures to curb the impact of the pandemic.

The Greater Accra region was the epicentre of the pandemic and still is (UNICEF, 2020b; 2020c). The government instituted a partial lockdown in Greater Accra and Greater Kumasi for three weeks which was later lifted on 20 April 2020. President Akufo-Addo on Sunday, July 26 2020, announced further easing of restrictions on places of worship, restaurants, and bars, among others. At

this point in time, Ghana had recorded 38,969 confirmed COVID-19 across its 16 regions with 168 related fatalities. In the President's address, starting Saturday, 1 August 2020, the restrictions earlier imposed on the number of worshippers and hours of worship in churches and mosques were to be lifted. The hours of worship were increased to two hours with further easing of limitations on the number of passengers on public transport and domestic flights. Also, tourist centres and open-air drinking spots were to be allowed to reopen. These notwithstanding, other preventive measures such as the mandatory wearing of face masks, closure of schools at some levels remained in place (Ministry of Health, 2020b).

In response to this, the Government, private sector, and CSOs in Ghana instituted several measures and procedures to address the impact of the pandemic on the general population. The interventions have led to the implementation of several procedures, precautions, and response measures to combat, curb the spread and reduce the impact on citizens. The private sector is also massively supporting the fight against the pandemic in Ghana.

In March 2020, the private sector started the Ghana COVID-19 Private Sector fund to provide a prompt response to the hardship and suffering arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic. The fund has raised a total of GHS 43.16 million out of an ambitious target of GHS 100 million (Ghana Covid-19 Private Sector Fund, 2020). The funds raised are being used to wholly or partly fund priority interventions by the State in the fight against COVID-19, resource health facilities with medical supplies and equipment, educate and promote citizen behaviour required in the fight against the pandemic, and other purposes the trustees consider useful. Through the fund, the private sector has constructed Ghana's first 100-bed infectious disease facility centre in Accra to house critically ill COVID-19 patients for treatment.



Beyond these, the civil society sector also rolled out several response programmes to augment the plight of the people, curb the spread and deal with stigmatisation, among others.

2.3 CSOs' Role and Contributions in the Fight Against the COVID-19 Pandemic

CSOs' role and contributions in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic have been varied across the globe (Beardmore & Gibbons, 2020). The sector has been at the forefront of the global pandemic, working in collaboration with governments and the private sector to curtail the impact of the coronavirus with an eye on the recovery (Rick, 2020; LINC, 2020). As Brechenmacher and Carothers (2020) rightly noted, pandemic-related activism may naturally vary widely across different contexts, but some common features stand out. Across different cities and countries, one thing has been common – citizens are coming together in new voluntary associations and mutual aid societies.

Civic action against this pandemic has been widespread as the virus itself. The actions of citizens who came together in different forms of voluntary associations across different countries and cities have been documented (Savage, 2020). Brechenmacher and Carothers (2020) referred to a rise in mutual aids around the world during the pandemic. They reference a shift in the work of established civil society groups from longer-term projects to emergency relief responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though shifts of the nature referred to here by Brechenmacher and Carothers (2020) are natural for most development

and humanitarian organisations, organisations that typically work on human rights and democracy issues tend to be repurposing to address the COVID-19 disease pandemic (Schwier & Holland, 2020) often with a focus on protecting vulnerable groups in society (Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2020).

In Africa, CSOs have shown similar commitments according to the evidence available (Schwier & Holland, 2020; Schwier, Wallington, Holland, & Magoronga, 2020; Barnard & Maruru, 2020). A research report by AfricanNGOs and EPIC-Africa in June 2020, chronicled the involvements of CSOs on the African continent in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The report noted that despite the formidable impact of the pandemic on CSOs' operations, the organisations actively immersed themselves in national and continent-wide responses to the situation (Barnard & Maruru, 2020, p.17). The efforts of CSOs on the continent have included advocacy works in highlighting human rights abuses, and ensuring transparency and accountability, emergency response in the provision and distribution of food and aids, facilitation of effective CSO involvement in the fight as well as research and documentation (Barnard & Maruru, 2020; Adom, Osei, & Adu-Agyeman, 2020; CIVICUS, 2020a; STAR-Ghana, 2020a; Ohene, 2020; ReAct Africa & Africa-CDC, 2020; Savage, 2020; WACSI, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; Eribo, 2020).

In Ghana, despite initial concerns over the neglect of CSOs in the national response strategy against the COVID-19 disease pandemic, CSOs remained significant actors in responding to the needs of the citizens all across the country (Arthur, 2020a; WACSI, 2020c; WACSI, 2020d; STAR-Ghana, 2020b). Similar to reports across the continent, Ghanaian CSOs have been instrumental in providing information and education on essential preventive etiquettes, supporting government's efforts to reach remote and hard-to-reach population, providing health training and supplies, confronting COVID-19 stigma and misinformation as well as monitoring the national COVID-19 expenditures and holding leaders to account for their stewardship (STAR-Ghana, 2020b; WACSI, 2020e). The organisations have also been active in advocating for the rights of citizens as well as equitable policies and actions (WACSI, 2020c; Vandyck, 2020b; Graphic Online, 2020a).



At the national level, CSOs under the leadership of STAR-Ghana Foundation with support from the United Kingdom Agency for International Development (UKAID) and the European Union (EU), officially initiated its coordinated response programme in April 2020 which sought to complement and deepen planned and ongoing efforts of the civil society sector during the pandemic (STAR-Ghana, 2020b; Ghana News Agency, 2020). The project dubbed the 'Ghana COVID-19 Response Project' (CRP), sought to support and coordinate civil society actions around COVID-19 prevention, management, and mitigation in Ghana (Arthur, 2020b).

The project included the award of about four million, eight hundred thousand Ghana Cedis (GHS 4,800,000.00) to STAR-Ghana's seven (7) strategic partners (STAR-Ghana, 2020c). The partners in turn worked with several sub-partners to deliver on COVID-19 prevention, management, and mitigation initiatives across the country. Through these coordinated efforts, the CSOs succeeded in reaching out to well over 800,000 people with useful and reliable information on the COVID-19 pandemic. They raised funds to support the vulnerable, tracked government expenditure, advocated for inclusive, transparent, and accountable implementation of the measures.

The CSOs Platform on the SDGs for instance had great success in mobilising resources locally in support of the vulnerable across the country. The Platform launched its COVID-19 Response Fund on March 30, 2020 which at the time of this report had realised GHS 114,612.62 out of a target of GHS 200,000. These funds were targeted at addressing some of the challenges of inequality worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Part of the amount mobilised were used to take care of street children, the aged, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and some mentally challenged persons within the key lockdown areas in Kumasi, Accra, and Kasoa.

Leveraging on the strength and expertise of its members and the DSW, the Platform spent a total of GHS 58,250 on these groups in its first phase of measures implementation between April and May 2020 (WACSI et al., 2020, p.32). The Platform distributed relief items to over 1,437 vulnerable groups and individuals in the three lockdown areas in May 2020 alone. The platform in its response also supplied 5000 facemasks and 9000 information

education and communication (IEC) materials to PWDs, street children, the aged, and mentally challenged persons to aid sensitisation efforts of CSOs, the State, and other interest groups. The Platform spent a total of about 96,400 on these activities excluding cost of media coverage, transportation, and others.

All the efforts enumerated above were meant to augment the government's attempt to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on citizens.

2.4 Impact of COVID-19 on CSOs

Research across the globe shows that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on all sectors of society have been extensive (Smith, 2020; United Nations, 2020; Nicola et al., 2020; CARE International, 2020a). On the African continent, the case has not been any different (CARE International, 2020b) even though the continent failed to live up to the initial hype that it would record astronomical cases and fatalities (WHO, 2020c; Sarfo, Ansah, & Amoah, 2020).

There have been considerable changes in civil society dynamics in Africa over the past few decades (Vandyck, 2020a). Much of the change in the sector has originated from the cuts in traditional forms of funding for the sector's organisations (Arhin, Kumi & Adam, 2018). As Vandyck (2020) acknowledges, these changes have over the years created multiple streams of challenges for civil society organisations in Africa and Ghana in particular. Indeed,



Social distance

the fact that civil society was changing is something that had since been recognised in the literature (Atuguba, 2015; Magnoni, 2020; Vandyck, 2020a) and in line with this recognition, many solutions have been proffered (WACSI, 2015; Magnoni, 2018). The proposed measures for dealing with change notwithstanding, the dramatic adjustments occasioned by the present COVID-19 pandemic uniquely caught the civil society sector unawares (Brenchenmacher & Carothers, 2020).

In Ghana, situational reports show that the sector's organisations have been greatly impacted by the pandemic and its associated restrictions (WACSI, 2020f). The areas with the greatest impact according to these reports have been the impact on traditional ways of working, disruptions to CSOs' programmes and project delivery, the strain on financial resources, and the challenges of programme implementation amid COVID restrictions and protocols (Vandyck, 2020). Months into the pandemic, the prediction that CSOs operating at the community level were more likely to feel the greatest impact mainly due to the way they operate (Vandyck, 2020a), is playing out. While scenario planning has been part of CSO culture for years, it appears the unexpected and turbulent nature of this pandemic made it difficult for the sector to react effectively from the onset.

2.5. CSOs' Strategies for Managing Sustainability Challenges Amidst COVID-19

Existing records show that there has been sustained action after the initial surprise, with civil society fighting back to resume their place in society. The organisations have been actively working to sustain their relevance in society while also ensuring that they will be around tomorrow to continue their work.

While the sustainability issues have not been effectively addressed, there exists evidence in the literature of some good steps taken by some of the sector's organisations

to improve their resilience to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several steps are being taken in this respect. Key among the strategies have been efforts by the sector organisations to acquire digital technologies to enable them to engage even remotely (STAR-Ghana, 2020).

Particularly, many organisations are reported to be repositioning themselves to ensure their relevance during the pandemic as a way of ensuring their ultimate sustainability (Resource Centre Network Ghana, 2020). Others, have been building capacity, resorting to local fundraising, and forming alliances and collaborations for their survival (Resource Centre Network Ghana, 2020; STAR-Ghana, 2020a; Vandyck, 2020b).

2.6 Conclusion

Quite clearly, civil society has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The sector in Ghana has equally been responding to the situation as much as possible. Beyond the fleck of information available in the form of blogs and news feeds, very little is known in terms of empirical research evidence on the impact of the pandemic on CSOs' operations and programmes. The current situation only comes to add to an existing problem of the civil society sector in Ghana – documentation. The sector's organisations are doing a lot but not much of it gets documented. We can only be sure of the contribution of the civil society sector in dealing with the pandemic in this country when there is data. The fact that the government failed to recognise the leading roles CSOs could have played in the State's response to the pandemic reinforces the point here that CSOs impact is often not documented and therefore goes unnoticed. The present study is part of the ongoing efforts by WACSI to change this narrative by providing empirical data on the impact of the pandemic on CSOs and their response to the situation.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



This section of the report explains the processes that were followed in arriving at the research data and discussing it. It covers mainly the key decisions and actions taken in the generation of the information used for understanding the problem of interest.

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a sequential exploratory mixed methods design. Within this design, a quantitative research approach with a questionnaire was used to have a broad appreciation of how CSOs in Ghana were being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The approach also explored how the organisations were responding to the effects of the pandemic and related constraints on their operations and programmes. The qualitative approaches of expert interviews and focus group discussion (FGD) were employed to get a detailed account of the peculiar experiences of individual organisations and an in-depth appreciation of the situation from the perspective of key leaders of the sector. The WACSI team was instrumental in facilitating access to the CSO database for purposes of sampling. Also, in the identification and interviewing of civil society experts, there was an effective collaboration from the team.

3.2 Population and Sampling Frame

All CSOs registered on the West African Civil Society E-directory served as the primary population for this study. The West African Civil Society E-directory is an online platform created by WACSI to map out all legally registered and operational CSOs, CBOs, NGOs, and FBOs in the West African Region. Ghanaian CSOs registered on the e-directory platform were invited to indicate their interest in participating in the study. A list of two hundred and eleven (211) Ghanaian organisations generated from the platform served as the sampling frame for the survey and focus group discussion. Of that number, 86 CSOs participated in the survey.

A select number of organisations on the e-directory platform who had earlier expressed interest in the study through a survey on that purpose, were invited (based on

their activities and organisational types) to participate in the focus group discussion with a three-day deadline. The FGD had nine (9) CSO practitioners registered from across the country by the deadline.

Also, a letter of invitation was sent to 10 civil society organisation leaders selected purposively to participate in an interview to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on CSOs' operations and programmes and the response of the sector to the pandemic. These leaders were selected on the basis of their wealth of knowledge and experience in the sector's operations and activities in Ghana as well as their organisations' participation in coordinated activities of the sector during the pandemic. Of this number, five (5) affirmed their participation and were subsequently interviewed via the Zoom Meeting App.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Since field observations were not going to be prudent under the prevailing circumstances of COVID-19 precautions and restrictions, three key instruments were developed for the study. The instruments included a questionnaire, interview guide, and a focus group discussion guide with inputs from the team of researchers under the project.

First, reviews of reports and publications on the COVID-19 pandemic generated some useful snapshots of the situation and how CSOs were generally being affected by the pandemic. This review guided the development of the various research instruments with inputs from WACSI's Knowledge Management team and the lead researcher. The first instrument developed was the questionnaire used for the survey. The developed questionnaire was shared with colleagues for further review and inputs. The inputs of team members helped to fine-tune the instrument with some harmony before the start of the survey. Following the outcome of the survey, the key themes that emerged were used to develop context-specific focus group discussion and interview guides for the qualitative study.



3.4 Data Collection Strategy

Data collection for this study started with a survey. The questionnaire which was designed into a web-format using SurveyMonkey was distributed online to all the CSOs who had indicated an interest in participating in the project through an earlier invitation from WACSI. The survey received 86 valid responses from CSOs in Ghana which were used for the analysis of the Ghana case.

This exercise was followed immediately with a focus group discussion in Ghana. Nine (9) CSOs from diverse backgrounds participated in the discussion which was held on the Zoom Video Meeting App. The participating CSOs operated in health, education, development, governance, and gender among many other sectors. The duration of the focus group discussion was two (2) hours and was moderated by the country researcher for Ghana. The discussion focused mainly on the impact of COVID-19 on CSOs' operations and programmes, organisational funding, domestic resource mobilisation, and sustainability. It also explored the impact of the pandemic on CSO-donor relations, and CSOs' role and relationship with stakeholders and what the sector's response has been.

The expert interviews sought to take the discussion further by interviewing key experts from the sector in Ghana. Three (3) expert interviews were conducted in the southern part of Ghana and two (2) from the northern part. These interviews which were conducted via Zoom focused mainly on a discussion of the impact of the pandemic on the sector's organisations and what the response of the sector has been. It explored the collaborative and individual efforts of organisations in the sector in dealing with the impact of the pandemic.

All the interviews (including the FGD) were audio-recorded with the consent of participants and transcribed verbatim for further analysis and presentation. Data triangulation from multiple sources offered a unique opportunity for the data to yield the best of results with a high rate of reliability.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data from this study were analysed using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The data from the survey were analysed using descriptive and nonparametric statistics in SPSS. On the qualitative side, thematic analysis was employed. The FGD and interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. The analysis involved a critical reading of the transcripts emerging from the interviews and the FGD followed by a close examination of the data for ideas and key patterns of shared understanding that came up across interview transcripts repeatedly. The emerging patterns were categorised and their interpretations examined in line with the general framework of the discussion of the impact of COVID-19 on CSOs operations and programmes.

The transcripts were organised along the key themes that were developed through the analysis and interrogated further for convergent and divergent interpretations. The key themes that emerged from the analysis included the impact of COVID-19 on CSOs' operations, funding, domestic resource mobilisation and sustainability, COVID-19 and donor-CSO relations, as well as CSOs' role and relationship with stakeholders. These themes were then triangulated with the survey data and presented for a comprehensive appreciation of the issues raised by the research questions. In ensuring confidentiality, the names of all participants and their organisations have been anonymised. Thus, in this report, where names were required for impact, pseudo names were used.



4.0 KEY FINDINGS





4.1 Overview / Landscape of CSOs Surveyed

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the sampled 86 CSOs that participated in the survey. Of this, 87.2% self-identified as non-governmental organisations (NGO) with the remaining 12.8% being community-based, faith-based, and coalitions or umbrella organisations. A plausible explanation for this skewness is the tendency for CSOs in Ghana to describe their organisations generically as NGOs. It is therefore not uncommon in the Ghanaian context to have some FBOs and CBOs describe themselves as NGOs.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participating CSOs

Characteristics		Frequency	%
Description of Organisation	Non-governmental organisation	75	87.2
	Community-based organisation	5	5.8
	Faith-based organisation	3	3.5
	Unions/coalitions/umbrella organ	3	3.5
	Total	86	100

Existence	Less than 5 years	21	24.4
	Between 6-10 years	22	25.6
	Between 11-20 years	30	34.9
	21 years and above	13	15.1
	Total	86	100
Geographic Location	Capital city	36	41.9
	Urban	22	25.6
	Semi-urban	11	12.8
	Rural	16	18.6
	Others, please specify	1	1.2
	Total	86	100.0
Level of operation	Community	13	15.3
	District	14	16.5
	Regional	15	17.6
	National	43	50.6
	Total	85	100.0

Most of these organisations (50.6%) have their operations at the national level while others span regional (17.6%), district (16.5%) and community (15.3%) levels. As would become evident in this report, many of the CSOs are engaged in advocacy and this partly explains why the majority consider their operations as being at the national level. For many of the organisations in this category, their operations span several contexts. Closely in line with this information, some 41.9% of the participating organisations are located at the national or regional capitals. Only 18.6% as indicated in Table 1 describe their geographical setting as rural. Those operating in suburban areas constituted 12.8% of the survey sample. It is worth mentioning that some CSOs have difficulty in giving a geographic location as this could only fairly refer to their offices. Thus, a CSO's office may be located at the district capital but functions within the communities. The location of these organisations are influenced by several factors and as Kumi (2017b) acknowledged, the location decision of the majority of CSOs are "influenced in part by extreme needs, goal congruence and resource dependency" (Kumi, 2017b, p.64).

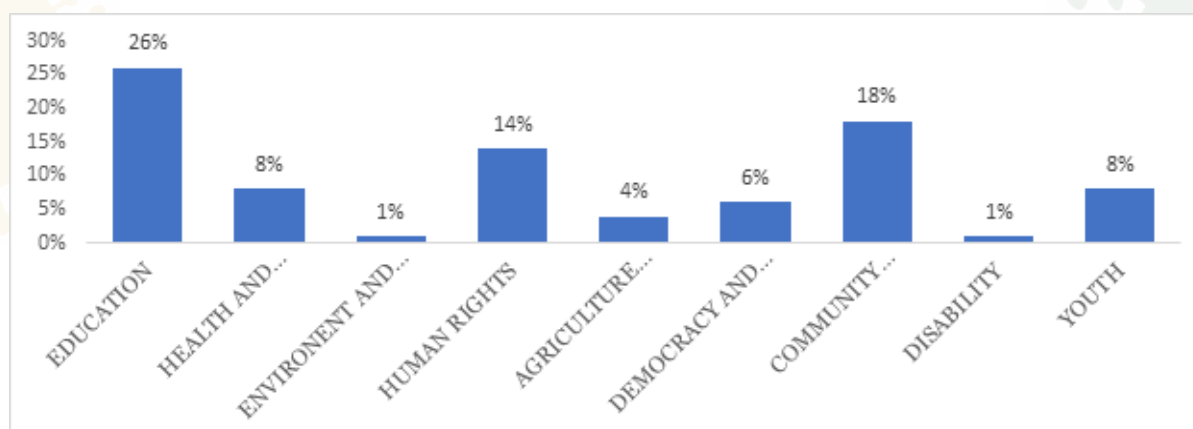


Figure 1: CSOs' thematic area(s) of work

As the data presented in Table 1 show, 50% of the CSOs have been in existence for 10 years or less while 50% have existed beyond eleven years in the country. Some 15.1% of these CSOs reported being in existence for more than 21 years. Quite clearly, the ages of these organisations affirm earlier points made about the boom in CSO numbers across Ghana two decades ago by Amoah (2019), Kumi (2017b), and Atuguba (2015) due mainly to the factors earlier advanced in this report (Kumi, 2017b; Tsikata et al., 2013; Gary, 1996; Hutchful, 2002).

On the thematic area of work, the majority of the organisations were into education. Others worked on health and water and sanitation, human rights, environment and wildlife, culture and food security, democracy and governance, community development, disability, and youth activities. It is important to add at this point that there is a reasonable probability that the high number involved in education are organisations active in advocacy. Figure 1 gives a detailed description of the key thematic areas covered by the CSOs in this study. (See figure 1).

Table 2 presents a description of the total number of full-time paid employees of the CSOs who participated in the survey. Quite curiously, many of the CSOs in this study had lean workforces. About 54.3% of the sampled CSOs had between one and five full-time paid employees.

Table 2: Total number of full-time paid staff

Number of staff	Frequency	Percentage
1 - 5	44	54.3
6 - 10	22	27.2
11 - 20	9	11.1
21 - 40	4	4.9
61-100	1	1.2
Above 100	1	1.2
Total	81	100.0

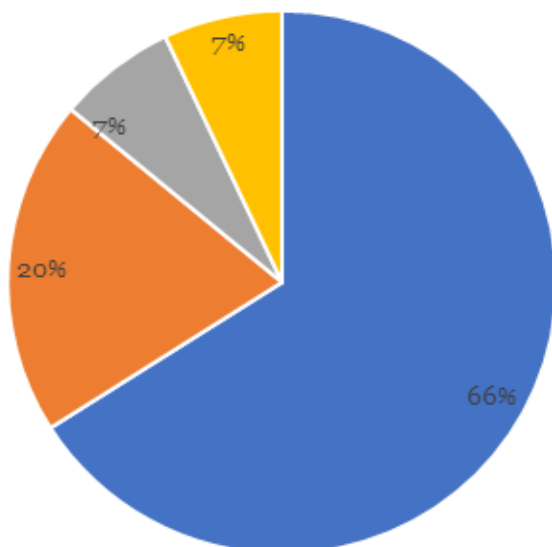
While the number of paid employees is not an absolute reflection of the size of an organisation, the statistic helps in appreciating the size and reach of CSOs. This information also holds some relevance for discussions in the present study. As can be seen in Table 2, less than 19% of the participating CSOs had over 11 full-time paid employees. This confirms an earlier observation by Amoah (2019) that CSOs in Ghana operate with lean staff supported by interns and volunteers.

It is worth admitting that individual CSOs' size and impact are heavily contested realities in the sector. They may not be easily comparable. That notwithstanding, the information on the budgets of these organisations (Table 3) gives some insight into the size and financial capabilities of the organisations. For example, it is interesting to find that a significant number of CSOs in this study (51%) have operational budgets less than US\$20,000. Of this number, nearly 26% report annual budget amounts less than US\$5000.

Table 3: Current estimated annual budget of participating CSOs

Estimated annual budget	Frequency	Percentage
Under US\$5000	21	25.6
Between US\$5001 and 20,000	21	25.6
Between US\$20,001 and US\$50,000	13	15.9
Between US\$50,001 and US\$100,000	9	11.0
Between US\$ 100,001 and US\$300,000	9	11.0
Between 300,001 and US\$ 500,000	2	2.4
Above US\$500,000	7	8.5
Total	82	100.0

Reasonably well related to their staff strengths, only 11% of the CSOs reported an annual budget amount of US\$300,000 and above. It is also important to mention that some 66% of the organisations receive funding or grants. The funding sources of those organisations who receive grants range from international NGOs, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies (including the United Nations, DFID, DANIDA, etc.), philanthropic and grant-making foundations, to individual donations. From figure 2, it is quite clear that 86% or more of the organisations' funds are sourced externally (outside of Ghana).



- International NGOs - 66%
- Bilateral and Multilateral donor agencies (e.g. UN agencies, DFID, DANIDA, etc.) - 20%
- Philanthropic and Grant making Foundations - 7%
- Individual donations - 7%

Figure 2: CSOs sources of funding

Considering the sources of funding for these CSOs, it would be interesting to know how the present situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is altering the funding situation of these organisations.

4.2 Impact of the COVID-19 on CSOs

4.2.1 Impact of the COVID-19 on the Operations and Programmes of CSOs

As part of the key objectives, this study sought to find out the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operations and programmes of CSOs in Ghana. Overall, an overwhelming majority of CSOs (83%) reported during the survey that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected their operations. As depicted in Figure 3, of the 17% of CSOs who did not report any negative effect of the pandemic on their operations, only 9% were emphatic that their operations and activities had not been impacted in any way.

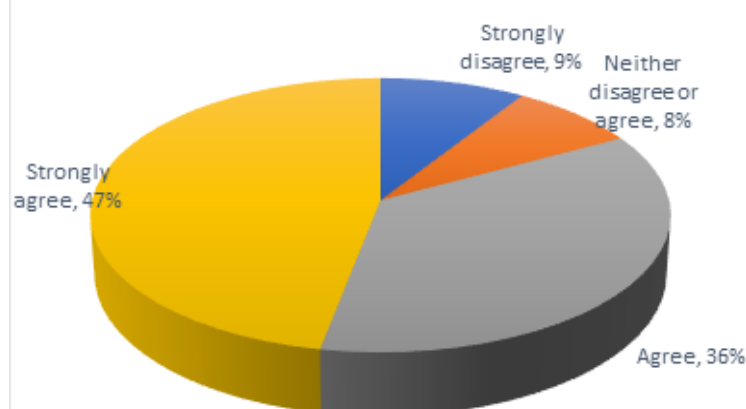


Figure 3: CSOs' report on whether the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected their operations.

The results show that Ghanaian CSOs are being impacted by the pandemic in a variety of ways. Particularly, strategies implemented by the state to curb the spread of the virus meant the imposition of restrictions on movement and large gatherings among other things. The implementation of these interventions, procedures, precautions, and response measures largely curtailed the operations and programmes of CSOs in the country. The imposition of restrictions in the form of lockdowns implied that some CSOs in the affected regions could not effectively function from their offices or even engage their communities of beneficiaries. To start with, only 33% of CSOs reported having a policy of working remotely from home. That is, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of these organisations (67%), had no policy to support their working remotely from home. This was explained by a participant during the expert interviews as follows:

"When it started, we just assumed that everyone knew what it means to be working from home. So, when it happened, we had to come out with a statement to clearly state what working from home means. That you must be available when you get up in the morning prepare yourself as if you are going to the office" (Kwame, a CSO practitioner).

Like the situation of the participant's organisation described above, many of the CSOs in this study shared their initial apprehension with working remotely from home. However, over time, many managed to adjust to the situation howbeit with difficulty. Some 79% of the CSOs had to close their offices during the partial lockdown imposed across the country's major cities. They were practically compelled to implement these remote working policies. As can be seen in Figure 4, 71% of the organisations which implemented remote working policies, did so mainly because of the pandemic.

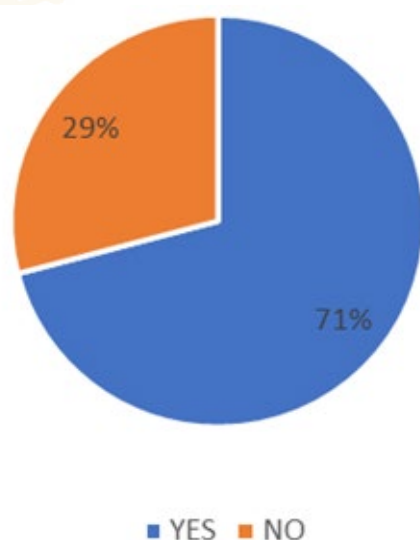


Figure 4: Implementation of remote working policy mainly because of COVID-19 pandemic

Owing mainly to the lack of policies and resources, most of the study participants reported that their organisations were not prepared for remote working. Amidst the pandemic, only 11% of the CSOs who participated in this study reported that they were well prepared for staff to work remotely. For the remaining 89%, COVID-19 and its attendant challenge of working remotely came to surprise them (see Table 4).

Table 4: Description of CSO's preparedness for staff working remotely amidst COVID-19

Staff Preparedness	Frequency	Percentage
The organisation was well prepared	9	11
The organisation was somewhat prepared	37	46
The organisation was not prepared at all	34	43
Total	80	100.0

Despite the lack of preparation, the COVID-19 pandemic pushed many of the CSOs in Ghana outside their comfort zones. The pandemic compelled some of them to become innovative. For instance, the common thought among many organisations in Ghana has been that the idea of working from home was not consistent with the context of their work. Others also thought that because they lacked the logistics, working remotely was never a thing to consider. A respondent's point in the following quote places the thoughts shared during the interviews in perspective:

"[.....]it has pushed us outside our comfort zones, it has compelled us to be innovative. Most of us initially thought that working from home was Eurocentric, that it was far from us and we did not have the logistics to do that. COVID has made us realize that it is possible to deliver without being in the office setting" (CSO representative, FGD participant).

Table 5 presents the results on the short-term impacts of the pandemic on operations and programmes. The results indicate that while the effects of the pandemic on the CSOs have been diverse, the key areas with the most effects were restrictions on staff movement, reduced staff strength, cancellation of meetings, conferences, training, workshops, and related campaigns. Other effects included the cessation of fieldwork and reduced community engagements as well as the loss of funding.

Table 5: Impact of COVID-19 on operations and programmes of CSOs in the short-term (i.e. 1-3 months)

Effect	Frequency	Percentage
Restriction of staff movement	39	46.4
Reduced staff strength	19	22.6
Cancelled meetings, conferences, and travels (national and international)	11	13.1
Reduced or cancelled operations (e.g. training, workshops, and campaigns)	9	10.7
Cessation of fieldwork and inability to have community interactions	2	2.4
Increased demand for services	3	3.6
Loss of funding	1	1.2
Total	84	100.0

As can be observed in the table above, the majority of the CSOs had their operations impacted. Particularly, those organisations that work at the community levels had activities that required community engagements appeared to have been the hardest hit in terms of operations and programmes. In the quote below, a programme officer at a women's development and empowerment NGO in Accra describes how the pandemic affected the organisation's project implementation during the FGD:

"[.....] unfortunately, we were on the field before this COVID-19 struck and we had to put all our projects on hold and so when it comes to project implementation it has actually disconnected us from our communities and the people as well. So, the effect or the impact of this COVID-19 is really negative" (Masa, an FGD participant).

One other participant in reference to member organisations of her network of NGOs, had this to say:

"If you come to our members in the field, most of them were almost folding up because the funding had really gone down" (Ama, a participant at the FGD).

Similar cases were shared during the in-depth interviews with some key informants. For instance, one interviewee explained that:

"Now, our community-level work is almost non-existent. And for partners who are going to the community level, we have very stringent rules... People should bring their own chairs from home for community meetings and we cannot stay in the community for more than a number of hours because of the travel time. We have to buy PPEs which were originally not part of the budget that our partners have given to us..." (Kate, key informant)).

In what appears like a departure from the general narrative on the impact of the pandemic on CSOs' operations and programmes, some 3.6% of organisations (refer to Table 5) indicated an increased demand for their services mainly because of the pandemic. A representative of one such organisation dealing with street children in the Ashanti Region, had this to say during the FGD session on the impact of the COVID-19 on CSOs':

"The impact of COVID-19 on CSOs has been undeniably negative, but on our part, fortunately for us, our target group are street children. In the initial part, we were also taken aback and affected with project implementation and implementation of our activities but the management team had to sit down and reflect on the situation and see how we could adjust our activities to meet the needs of

the time. Knowing that children in this situation are one of the most affected group by the COVID-19, we had to initiate new activities that can meet their needs within this time which we could write proposals for" (Janis, FGD participant).

The CSO according to the participant, worked all through the lockdown period and initiated new activities through which meals were cooked and served to children in the streets. In some instances, the organisation provided raw food (rice, oil, and others) to vulnerable groups in temporary dwellings during the pandemic. In this example, the CSO reported working actively through a realignment of their activities to continue to serve their beneficiaries effectively.

Table 6 presents the medium-term anticipated effects of the pandemic on CSOs operations as reported by representatives of these organisations. In responding to the question on the anticipated effect of COVID-19 on CSOs in the next 6-12 months, majority of the respondents (57%) reported the anticipated loss of funding as being the most important effect on their operations in the medium term.

Table 6: Effects of COVID-19 on the operations of CSOs in the next 6-12 months

Effect	Frequency	Percentage
Loss of funding	48	57
Increased organisational costs	17	20
Reduced staff strength	5	6
Restriction of staff movement	5	6
Cancellation of meetings and travels (national and international)	3	4
Reduction or cancellation of operations in communities	5	6
Increased in demand for services	1	1
Total	84	100.0

Other effects as presented in Table 6 include increased organisational costs which are related to technological infrastructure to support remote working, reduced staff strength and movement, cancellations of meetings and travels, and reduced community engagements, among others. Many of the organisations anticipate a combination of many of the factors listed in Table 6.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its attendant restrictions affected CSOs and their ability to deliver on their programmes and services. About 84% of the CSOs reported that their ability to provide programmes and services to beneficiary communities had reduced because of the COVID-19. So, as Abo put it during the interview session:

“There are people who are delivering services, complementing government, the public you know, service delivery to vulnerable people, to people in the rural areas, they cannot work because of social distancing, because of the pandemic particularly where there was a lockdown. There was no way they could do any work” (Abo, executive director of a CSO in Accra).

As can be appreciated in Table 7, barely 16% of the CSOs reported not suffering reduced capacity in delivering on their services and programmes to beneficiary communities.

Table 7: The extent to which CSOs were able to provide services to beneficiaries during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
To a greater extent than usual	8	9.3
Same as we always do	6	7.0
In a severely reduced capacity	37	43.0
In a moderately reduced capacity	27	31.4
Not at all	6	7.0
Others	2	2.4
Total	86	100.0

For most CSOs, the impact has been severe because they work directly with the people and in most cases, their activities involved direct engagement with the people at the local level. The following quote extracted from the FGD from a narrative by one participant who heads a women’s development NGO in the country gives a clear idea of how organisations like hers have been impacted:

“We are actually grounded... you can’t go to the community to engage the women and you are also unable to move online. They have just ‘yam phones’ so you can’t even do this Zoom thing. Even calling them on phone is difficult because they have a poor network” (Vora, FGD participant)

It is important to situate the data in Table 6 within the appropriate context. For a few of the CSOs in this study, COVID-19, despite its devastating effects on many organisations, came to reinforce the significance of their work. Even though in the minority, for this set of CSOs, their activities, services and programmes were not negatively impacted by the pandemic. During the FGD, some CSOs shed light on how the pandemic re-emphasised the importance of their work. This was emphasised strongly by Ama as the case particularly with her network of organisations:

“So for us, I don’t think COVID is changing our focus or mission, it just come to re-emphasise what we are working on. For us, we are working in WASH and then I think that with COVID, WASH has become very essential services so it’s just coming to reinforce whatever we were already advocating for – sustainable WASH services for everyone everywhere especially the vulnerable” (Ama, FGD participant).

The argument made in the quote above, was found to be particularly the case with CSOs involved in sustainable WASH. For many of these organisations, their advocacy for sustainable WASH in schools only had to shift to the community level.

Responses from participants to the question of whether they can pay their staff on payroll for the next four to eight weeks following the survey date without any additional funding is presented in Table 8. Significantly, 86% of participants during the survey gave indications to the effect that their organisations would not be able to pay their staff for the next four to eight weeks without additional funding.

Table 8: The likelihood that CSOs can pay staff on their payroll for the next four to eight weeks without additional funding.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Somewhat likely	39	46.4
Somewhat unlikely	19	22.6
Very unlikely	11	13.1
Neither unlikely nor likely	9	10.7
Very likely	2	2.4
Total	86	100.0

Primarily due to reduced funding, some of the CSOs reported that they were compelled to lay off some staff for their survival as explained by one Executive Director: There are some people who were asked that look, your project cannot get funding, so we have to stop you from working. So, there are some people who had to be exited because they could not, their project could not continue to get funding, so we have to get you to exit (Kwame, a key informant).

It is refreshing, however, to note that as at the time of the study, only 17% of the organisations had need to dismiss some employees specifically due to the constraints imposed by the pandemic on their financial position. While 58% of the CSOs said they were prepared to adapt their organisations to cope with the negative implications of the disruptions the COVID-19 pandemic had on their operations, a good number of them (42%) were not prepared.

Whereas many of the CSOs (65%) have taken appropriate steps or measures in response to COVID-19 to purposely safeguard their operations, a significant minority appear to have not been able to do anything at all or done too little (35%) to safeguard their operations. For 81% of the CSOs, adapting their operations within the measures taken by the state to fight against the pandemic was difficult. Instructively, only 12% of the organisations reported that their adaptation to the measures taken in the fight against the pandemic was without difficulty.

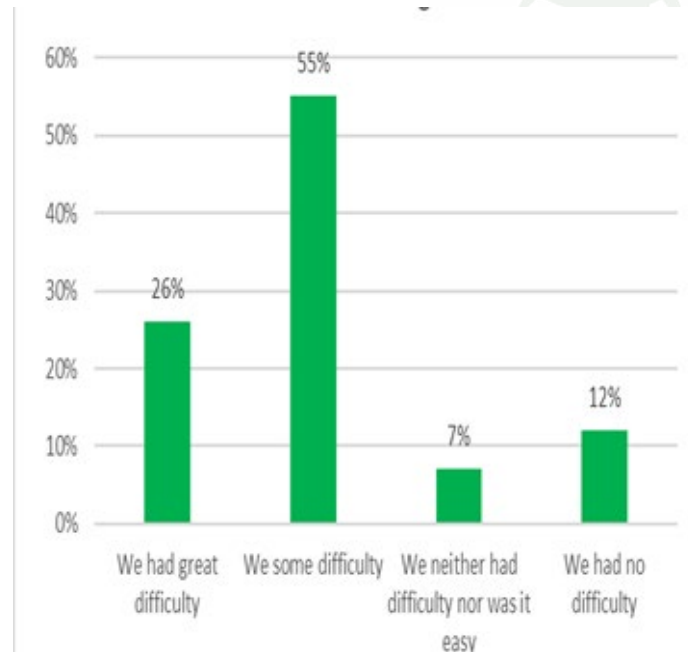


Figure 5: How easily CSOs adapted their operations within the measures taken to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic

The next section discusses the data on the effects of the pandemic on CSOs' funding and ultimate sustainability.

4.2.2 Impact of the COVID-19 on Funding, Domestic Resource Mobilisation and Sustainability

Existing literature reveals that CSOs may be feeling the impact of the COVID-19 on their financial resources (Vandyck, 2020c; STAR-Ghana, 2020b). So, this study sought to understand the ways by which these organisations are being impacted financially and whether this is affecting local resource mobilisation efforts. As was reported under the demographics, 66% of the CSOs receive funding in the form of grants to support their operations and programmes. Curiously, over 86% of these organisations rely on external funding sources. Table 9 details the various ways the COVID-19 pandemic affected the funding of the CSOs.

Table 9: Ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has affected CSOs' organisational funding.

Effect	Frequency	%
Delayed or reduced funding from donors	44	51
Funding restrictions and constraints	26	30
Provided opportunities for mobilisation of domestic/ alternative resources	15	18
Increased funding allocations	1	1
Total	86	100.0





Among the many effects of the pandemic on CSOs' organisational funding, delay and reduction in donor funding were reported as the topmost effect. Fifty-one (51%) of the organisations blamed what they referred to as "delayed or reduced funding from donors" on the COVID-19 pandemic. A section of CSOs (30%) reported other funding restrictions and constraints as a key effect of the pandemic. For instance, during the FGD, a participant recounted how the pandemic hit both internal and external funding streams of his organisation:

"COVID-19 actually impacted on our funding stream with our partners. For instance, a project that was to start about 2 weeks before the lockdown has since been cancelled. So, it actually had a hard toll on (the organisation). Our school ... has also been closed down due to the school closure" (Asa, a participant of the FGD).

Another participant also expressed concerns over the changes on the funding front caused by the pandemic:

"Under this circumstance, you realize that the donor community is now looking at emergency cases so funding an area of HIV will have to be shifted, funding in the area of immunization is going shifting, funding in the area of malaria and what have you are all going to be shifted. These are all cutting down our funds, therefore it will trickle down to our sustainability strategy and plans as an organisation" (Kwaku, FGD participant).

The same sentiments were shared by some interviewees. Aba offered some plausible explanation for the impact of the COVID-19 on Ghanaian CSOs:

"Civil Society Organisations, for many of them, a significant number and I can say 90% and more have to depend on the projects that they do to survive in terms of running their operations. They do not have funding that is given for running their institutions and strengthening their institutions. A lot of the funding that they get, comes from programmes, activities, and projects" (Aba, Key informant).

Following the observation made above by Aba, one realises that any disruptions to project funding was likely to affect about 90% of CSOs. So, for many of the CSOs, their very existence was threatened by any cuts in project funding.

The negative effects recounted notwithstanding, the pandemic according to 18% of the organisations (see Table 9), provided opportunities for mobilising domestic or alternative resources. Among the organisations that had some success with local fundraising was Janis' organisation which worked with street children the Ashanti region. Janis shared her experience in the following quote during the FGD:

"I think one thing we have been doing is we put messages on social media, Facebook, Whatsapp, and we have been receiving a lot of local donations. Particularly when it came to the provision of the hot meals, we got a lot of donation from the locals within Ghana. Some will send money through mobile money, some organisations and institutions also sent us some money" (Janis, FGD participant).

It is important to note that in line with the survey results, the case described in the quote above is in the minority experience. As would become clear in this report, not many of the CSOs are engaged in domestic resource mobilisation of any sort beyond what was championed by the STAR-Ghana foundation in partnership with others during the pandemic. The survey results show that the majority of CSOs (77%) shared in the belief that the COVID-19 pandemic will affect their organisational funding in the next 3-6 months. While 13% were not particularly sure whether this will happen, 10% did not share in that belief. When asked whether they will survive the next 6-12 months without additional funding, 38% of the CSOs answered in the negative. Of the remaining 62% who believe they would survive, 40% will survive but with significant cut to staff and programmes.

This revelation should not be surprising because a great majority of the CSOs in responding to a question on whether they had financial reserves to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 on their funding for the next 6-12 months said no. This leaves only 27% of the CSOs with reserves to fall on in case of any curtailment of external funding. The majority of CSOs (69%) share the view that the COVID-19 pandemic provides opportunities for CSOs in Ghana to mobilise domestic resources to support their activities (See Table 10). These respondents were of the view that the mobilisation of domestic resources will help in mitigating the negative impact of COVID-19 on the sustainability of many CSOs.

Table 10: The COVID-19 pandemic provides opportunities for CSOs to mobilise domestic resources to support their activities

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	8	9.6
Disagree	6	7.2
Neither disagree or agree	12	14.5
Agree	40	48.2
Strongly agree	17	20.5
Total	83	100.0

While believing in the opportunity, only 32% of CSOs in this study raised any resources domestically during the pandemic to complement their donor funding. As can be observed in Figure 6, 68% of the CSOs have not mobilised any domestic resources during the period under consideration.

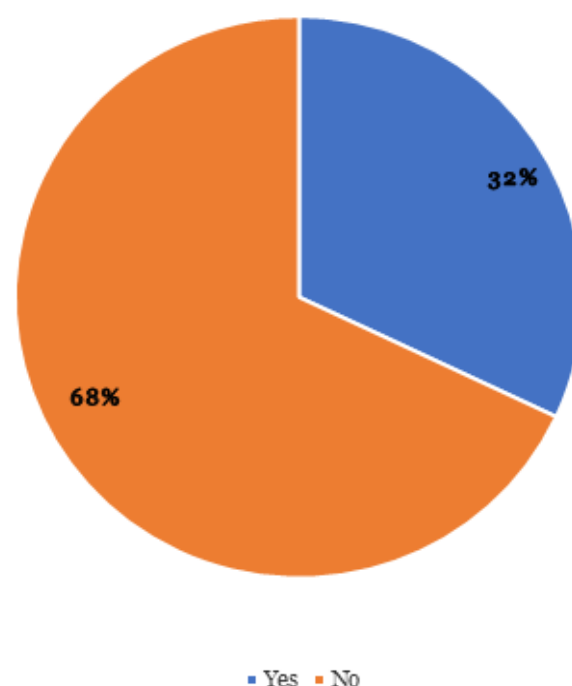


Figure 6: Have participating CSOs raised any domestic resources during the COVID-19 pandemic to complement external donor funding?

Confirming earlier claims by Vandyck (2020c) that lack of capacity for local fundraising remains CSOs weakest link, most of the participants in the present study said CSOs lacked the capacity (i.e. technical, personnel and material) to mobilise domestic resources to support their activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 11: CSOs in Ghana lack the capacity (technical, personnel and material) to mobilise domestic resources to support their activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	7	8
Disagree	5	6
Neither disagree or agree	8	10
Agree	33	39
Strongly agree	31	37
Total	84	100.0

As Table 11 shows, 76% of the CSOs hold the view that CSOs' inability to raise domestic resources had something to do with their lack of material, human and technical capacity for so doing.

In the qualitative analysis, aside from the issue of capacity, other important concerns for the lack of domestic resource mobilisation were raised some of which are worth exploring. In the expert interviews, for instance, some practitioners referred to the difficulty in getting access to their usual funding from corporate partners locally:

“Domestically, any funding institution that you approach, they tell you they have given to the national COVID-19 response team. So, even corporate bodies that we were working with, they say, oh we have donated to the national, so we are unable to support at the local level” (Kwame, key informant).

The account in the preceding quote is particularly intriguing because the Ghana National COVID-19 Trust Fund, which is the fund referred to above, was instituted by the State and had nothing to do with civil society. However, some institutions which hitherto supported civil society cited their contribution to the fund as the cause of their inability to work with the CSOs.

Other participants attributed the CSOs inability to mobilise domestic resources during this period to a long-standing perception of the public about civil society:

“All along, our sustainability issues have not been addressed well because we think that the communities are poor so we always go to spoon-feed them and then when we move away, they go back to square one” (Vora, FGD participant).

This position expressed during the focus group discussion was reiterated during the expert interviews by some CSO leaders. This quote from an interviewee cited below, summarises the common position expressed during the interviews:

“we’ve always gone to communities and said we are coming to help you, we have gotten some money abroad to come and help you, you know that sort of mindset; [...] because of that, it (domestic resource mobilisation) has been difficult because then everybody sees you as the giver and not the receiver” (Kate, key informant).



The above concerns tie into a history of civil society focusing their accountability on external donors and not on our internal givers and beneficiaries (Amoah, 2019). Due mainly to this, the perception that NGOs are there only to give to the people has been fuelled over time within the Ghanaian society. Participants in this study believed that times are changing and therefore there is the need for an ecosystem shift starting with CSOs' accountability where the organisations account back to their constituencies on how they have used the funds that have come to them. These practitioners believe that when this is done, the communities will appreciate how the CSOs as trustees have used the funds to their benefit and then they will be more willing to give. As it stands now, however, the consensus is that not much has been done by CSOs in this respect:

“I don't think it is hard but it's just that we have to lay the ground well and I'm not sure, I don't think that we have invested enough with effort into doing that well” (Kate, key informant).

A lot of reflections have been ongoing about the effect of the pandemic on CSOs' financing. During the FGDs, many participants expressed the view that the poor record of giving to CSOs particularly in Ghana is a culture issue:

“First and foremost, it is about the giving culture because that is the foundational fact; ...even though we give, and we give a lot, we give to family, we give to friends, we give to communities that we trust. We do not necessarily give to institutions and particularly, social justice, social accountability, and social protection institutions” (Aba, key informant).

Considering the inputs from the FGD and the expert interviews as represented in the quotations cited so far, the factors responsible for the lack of local giving and or inability of CSOs to mobilise local resources are multifaceted. This interpretation of the data confirms earlier findings by Kumi (2017) who recognised the reduced external donor funding to CSOs in Ghana as an immediate threat to civil society space in the country. Despite Kumi's (2017) conclusion that social innovations in domestic resource mobilisation offered potentials for CSOs' financial sustainability in Ghana, the present findings affirm the assertion that domestic resource mobilisation remain a challenging task for CSOs in the country (Vandyck, 2020c).

4.2.3 Impact of the COVID-19 on CSOs'-Donor Relations

The pre-emptive and constant interactions between organisational partners has been recognised as key to CSOs' ability to manage and surmount the impact of the pandemic on their operations and sustainability. As such, the present study explored the state of CSOs' relations with their donors and key stakeholders and how this is being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

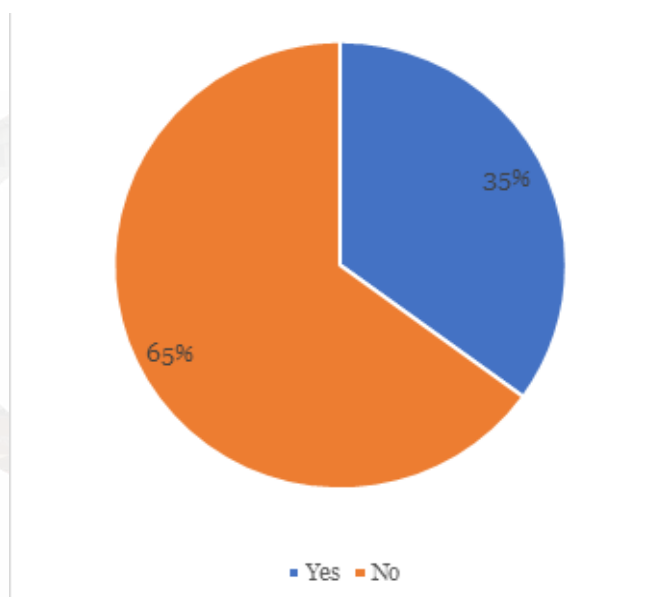


Figure 7: Have any of your funders informed you that COVID-19 may impact their ability to continue supporting your organisation?

While COVID-19 may be reforming CSO-donor relations in several ways, it is refreshing to notice in this study that not many funders of CSOs have as yet found cause to withdraw their financial support for the organisations as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure 7 presents the responses in this study to a question on whether the CSOs had been contacted by their funders over possibilities of funding withdrawals due to COVID-19.

Although the majority have not received any such distressing information, for 35% of CSOs to have received such a communication from their funders is quite disturbing considering the status of domestic resource mobilisation discussed earlier. The situation will threaten the survival of these CSOs as explained by one of the interviewees:

“We have been asked to slash our budget drastically by almost 40% because it's like yes, we all understand what we do because what they are saying is that there is a problem with cash flow maybe things should normalise by December but what will we be doing now till things normalize in December?” (Kwame, a key informant)

For a good number of the CSOs also, they anticipate a change in their relationship with funders informed by a change in funders' priorities after the COVID-19 pandemic. These perspectives shared by CSOs are presented in Table 12 below.

Table 12: CSOs' perspectives on the likelihood that funders/donors will change their priorities after the COVID-19 pandemic

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	2	2.4
Disagree	14	16.5
Neither disagree or agree	25	29.4
Agree	27	31.8
Strongly agree	17	20.0
Total	85	100.0

The study sought to explore the issues that CSOs and their donors have discussed in the spirit of mitigating the effects of the pandemic on their activities and programmes. The data shows that the extension of project completion dates as shown in Table 13 topped the discussions at the time of this study. Other discussions have bothered on the cancellation of project activities, details regarding the use of already disbursed donor funds among other discussions.

Table 13: Issues discussed with CSOs' donors in mitigating the effects of COVID-19

Issues discussed with donors	Frequency	Percentage
Extension of a project completion date	38	45.8
Cancellation of project activities	8	9.6
Details regarding the use of donor funding	6	7.2
Others, please specify	3	3.6
No, we have not discussed anything with donors	28	33.7
Total	83	100.0

As can be noticed in the table however, a significant number of the organisations (nearly 34%) have not discussed anything at all with donors. These survey results are not out of place because it has earlier been established under the demographics of the organisations that 34% of the CSOs in this study had indicated that they did not receive any grants or funding.

So far, donors have been fairly flexible in their dealings with CSOs' challenges in delivering on, and changes to projects and programmes. In describing the flexibility of donors to the needs of CSOs during the pandemic, the majority of organisations (54.2%) found their donors flexible. Only 17% described their donors as not being flexible in their response to the peculiar situations of their organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of the CSOs described donors' attitude during the pandemic as indifferent.

The data reveals some top needs of CSOs in Ghana requiring assistance from donors and stakeholders to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the organisations. These needs include mainly the re-evaluation of fundraising strategies, real-time data sharing, technological support, financial scenario planning, coaching on leading in ambiguity, volunteer recruitment and management, among others. Table 14 rank orders the top needs of these organisations as listed by the study participants.

Table 14: A rank ordering of top needs of CSOs requiring assistance from donors and stakeholders to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on their organisation

Top needs of CSOs	Frequency	Percentage
Re-evaluating fundraising strategies	61	73.5
Technology support (e.g., moving programmes online)	10	12.0
Financial scenario planning	5	6.0
Share real-time data with stakeholders	3	3.6
Coaching sessions for leading in ambiguity	2	2.4
Volunteer recruitment and management	1	1.2
Others	1	1.2
Total	83	100.0

Significantly, while recognising the significance of other needs, 74% of the participants named the re-evaluation of funding strategies. This was followed by the need for technological support and then help with financial scenario planning. For this reason, funding occupies such a special place because of the lack of support for CSOs in Ghana as one interviewee recounts:

"Many of them (CSOs) do not even have reserves, they live from hand to mouth. So, they don't have anything, any funding, any kind of pot of resources anywhere that they can fall on if they are not getting funding for a while" (Aba, a key informant).

From the account above, it is clear that the organisations find themselves in a pandemic where they are unable to do their activities and cannot engage their beneficiaries. At the same time, because of the lack of support for them, they have nothing to fall on in times of difficulty. So, it appears the longer this pandemic stays, the more threatened these CSOs would be as institutions. Data collected so far shows that while many CSOs have already had their programmes affected badly by the pandemic, there is an even bigger threat to the CSOs themselves actually existing beyond COVID-19 pandemic to continue with the good work they are doing.

4.2.4 Impact of the COVID-19 on CSOs' Role and Relationship with Stakeholders

It is quite disturbing to find that nearly half of all the CSOs represented in this study (49%) were not likely to continue to provide services to their beneficiaries between four and eight weeks of their existence. Even though the majority (67%) of the CSOs as shown in Table 15 are certain that their project activities can be sustained by intended beneficiaries after COVID-19, a significant minority (33%) of them were not sure this will happen.

Table 15: The certainty that CSOs' project activities can be sustained by intended beneficiaries after COVID-19 pandemic

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	2	2
Disagree	10	12
Neither disagree or agree	16	19
Agree	46	53
Strongly agree	12	14
Total	86	100.0

Despite notable changes to their operations, the organisations have remained largely consistent in terms of the roles they play. Many of the key informants agree that the pandemic has affected how they work, where they work, whom they work with, and what they work on, but their missions have remained stable. This point made by Aba places the discussion in perspective:

"It (COVID-19) that has affected what we work on; it has affected how we work; it has affected where we work; it has affected whom we work with; and it has also affected when we work. The only thing it hasn't affected is why we work because our missions are clear" (Aba, a key informant).

A key number of collaborations at the local levels were cited at the FGD even though this was not being replicated at the national level. The submission by an interviewee gives a fairly perfect description of the nature of collaboration between the CSOs and state departments:

"Some of the collaborations are also at the district level. Within the District Assembly Act (936), civil societies are also part of the municipal planning coordinating unit. As a result, in our case, we represent the CSOs in the district and we've done

a number of engagements at the district level, also mitigating the impact of COVID and also working closely with the District Health Directorate" (Kwaku, FGD participant).

One thing was clear, the national response to COVID-19 jettisoned the role of CSOs but as has been stated above, at the local level, some collaborations were noted between select state agencies, CSOs and the media. A Programme Officer of one CSO shared their experience in keeping up on their role and working with stakeholders during the pandemic:

"So, we have the support from STAR-Ghana but as part of our project, we have also decided to partner with these organisations across the country, 50 of them. And because we want to reach literates, illiterates, semi-literates and marginalized groups also and even in the remote part, we're working with these people to help us in communicating information that is familiar to those people" (Dada, a Key informant).

In line with the above point and in their effort to help deal with misinformation during this pandemic, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) with support from STAR-Ghana Foundation and other partners, instituted a COVID-19 Fact Checking project which is transmitted on several media platforms in Ghana (MFWA, 2020). This project tried to work with many stakeholders in a very coordinated fashion during the period under consideration.

4.3 CSOs' Responses and Strategies to COVID-19 to ensure CSOs' Survival and Sustainability

4.3.1 Strategies for mitigating the effects of COVID-19 on operations and programmes

According to the survey and interview data, a number of measures were implemented by the CSOs to mitigate the disruptions caused by the pandemic to their operations. The various measures and mechanisms adopted by the organisations in mitigating the effects of the pandemic on the CSOs' operations have been presented in Table 16.

Table 16: Measures or mechanisms put in place by CSOs to mitigate the disruptions caused by COVID-19 on their operations

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Reduced existing programmes and services (e.g. workshops and training)	55	64
Rely more on digital technologies	15	17
Have intentions of reducing existing programmes and services	5	6
Cut-back on administrative expenses	8	9
Rely on organisational reserves	3	4
Total	86	100.0

As the table shows, majority of the organisations (64%) have had to reduce existing programmes and services while a relatively small section of CSOs (17%) are also relying more on digital technologies among other measures. As was emphasised by some research participants from the Northern and Upper West Regions, some CSOs had to realign their operations to mitigate the effects of the pandemic:

“When the issue of COVID started, quickly we had to adopt a very proactive role in integrating the COVID in all our interventions. Clearly, most of the community level engagement meetings that we had

scheduled failed; we had to quickly do a recorded voice for the mosques and churches to play. Much information was not there because Ghana Health Service was still planning and preparing..., so we took that opportunity to get most of the WHO and the Ghana government’s preventive measures, got recordings out of it and then we were playing to the communities” (Asa, a FGD participant).

Another important strategy for the CSOs as shown in Table 16 is the reliance on digital technologies. A key number of organisations, in addition to reducing existing programmes and services, used one digital solution or another. As was the case with many organisations around the world, using online technologies enabled many of the CSOs in Ghana to continue to remain relevant and to serve their communities of beneficiaries.

The above notwithstanding, it would be naïve to think that digital solutions were enough in dealing with the problem of reach during this pandemic. This recognition was clear during the FGD and further reiterated during the expert interviews. The quote below places this discussion in context:

“So, we are using online tools all right. The positive side is that value for money, we are making gains from the cost of doing that. ...this is a strategy to continue to reach out to our constituencies. However, by doing that, we definitely know that some communities do not have even internet, to have electricity, to have a smartphone or a laptop to be able to, you know, call into some of this meetings. So, that in itself is also a negative” (Kate, a key informant).

Thus, while there have been efforts to mitigate the damaging effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the strategies did not in themselves reverse entirely, the negative impacts of the pandemic. In some cases, the nature of the work done by the CSOs could not necessarily be effectively delivered through other means.

4.3.2 Strategies for mitigating the effects of COVID-19 on funding

Some of the common strategies employed by the CSOs to curtail the impact of the pandemic on their funding were a refocusing of ongoing projects, cuts in spending on administrative activities and travel expenses, among others.



Our targets changed; so, we had to really engage our donors very fast, write to them officially. This thing that is happening, we have to change the focus. So, for interventions that had to do with targeting school children, we have to negotiate and then maybe agree with the donor that no, it's not going to be school again. We have to make it a community-focused intervention so most of that had some issues of COVID in it because now you cannot do anything without linking it to the COVID (Ama, FGD participant).

80% of the participating organisations in this study had to realign their projects and activities to remain relevant and resilient. Others had to cut down on administrative expenses to reduce the financial impact of the pandemic as explained in the quote below:

"On the positive side, we are saving cost around some of the things like meetings. So, in the past we would have done a two-day face to face meeting in a hotel, the cost of travel, the cost of feeding, accommodation and all those things. Now we do the event online and I think we are saving a lot from the cost that originally would have been used for administrative work" (Kate, a key informant).

There are yet others who resorted to local fundraising even though many admitted this was difficult to do:

"We are part of the CSO platform on SGDs. We are part of that platform where SEND Ghana together with others is raising funds at the top there. We are part of the regional platform; so together we discuss on that platform on how CSOs can collaborate in terms of raising funding and implementing activities in reducing the impact of COVID-19 on our beneficiaries. So that is one great platform. We are also part of the CSO platform on health, civil society coalition on health and we've been also looking at how collaboratively, we can raise funding to support activities" (Kwaku, FGD participant).

One area that is getting the attention of many of the CSOs at the local level is the village savings and loans associations (VSLA) concept. It appears the VSLAs are becoming rallying points for the community people. CSOs in response to the impact of the pandemic on funding are supporting the setting up of VSLAs in communities to keep their beneficiaries together and sustainably supported. The VSLA is a kind of corporative group that contributes money into a central source for the mutual benefit of members. Once funds of the VSLAs are grown, they serve as a source of loan for members of the associations and in some cases, activities of the NGOs they work with. Participants at the focus group discussion indicated their intentions to grow the VSLAs as a substitute for the loss in funding for their activities at the local level.

Another emerging response to mitigate the financial impacts of the pandemic has been the institution of social enterprises. Even though there is evidence to the effect that social entrepreneurship has been a strategic response to sustainability challenges in Ghana (see Kumi, 2019; Arhin et al., 2018; and WACSI, 2015), there appear to be a unique reawakening of CSOs to the potential of social entrepreneurship as an organisational resilience strategy.

Many of the CSOs indicated a more serious consideration of social entrepreneurship as a measure to stay afloat:

"One key thing in terms of sustainability we are looking at is to begin to look at some of our interventions we are having with our groups in the communities. We will social enterprise them so that they can be sources of income to the organisation" (Asa, FGD participant).

To this participant and others, the pandemic taught them lessons about turning their attention to sustaining their activities through self-financing because these projects and activities have the potential to generate their own funds.



4.3.3 Strategies for Mitigating the Effects on Donor-Relations

In dealing with the effect of the pandemic on their relations with donors, many of the organisations were quick to write to their donors to kick start discussions on stalled projects and the inability to meet delivery timelines:

"...there is also a lot of flexibility with some of the smaller donors in terms of the use of their monies. We had a six-month project with a small donor. We wrote to them and said because of COVID, we want to hold on to our work in March. ...that we want to hold on until after we see how the environment is and then continue and they readily agreed and since then we have discussions back and forth with them on how to change the style of work that we have" (Kate, a key informant).

Similar to the case cited in the quote above, Aba refers to her organisation's experience with donor relations and those of other CSOs in the sector:

"There are others that have said we can re-purpose the grants and so instead of working on this, which is rather not possible, let's do this. There are others that you can renegotiate the time with, the time frame to say when to... but so far, I think many of the funders have also been quite flexible. There are some funders who have actually cut funding because they are concerned about their own endowment" (Aba, a key informant).

From the quotes above, even though a handful of donors withdrew their support out of concerns over their own survival, the reports indicate the majority of donors have been flexible in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the CSOs report that they have had to search for new and emerging funding opportunities in the area of COVID-19 to make up for the impact they were having with distortions in existing donor relations. For this reason, some CSOs have resorted to the mobilisation of domestic resources. They engaged in some fundraising efforts locally but as has been made clear in this report, only few organisations were successful at raising any funds locally.

4.3.4 Strategies for mitigating the effects on CSOs' role and relationship with stakeholders

Despite the devastating effect of the pandemic on CSOs' operations and programmes in Ghana, many of the organisations have been involved in programmes and

initiatives aimed at mitigating the impact of the pandemic on beneficiary communities. During the survey, 85% of the CSOs reported active involvement in working with other CSOs and beneficiaries to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. These organisations have mainly been involved in advocacy and community education, data gathering and information sharing, coordinating donations and support for the vulnerable in society, and providing online capacity building (e.g. training and workshops) among others. Table 17 outlines these initiatives and activities engaged in by the CSOs towards mitigating the impact of the pandemic.

Table 17: Activities/ initiatives CSOs are focusing on during the pandemic

Activities	Frequency	Percentage
Advocacy and community education	59	88.1
Data gathering and information sharing	4	6.0
Coordinating donations and support for the vulnerable in society	3	4.5
Providing online capacity building (e.g. training and workshops)	1	1.5
Total	67	100.0

Table 18 details the specific response activities of the CSOs during the pandemic to support beneficiaries and communities. Specific response activities undertaken by the CSOs to support beneficiary communities during the COVID-19 pandemic have included mainly information for the public about the virus, risks, and preventive steps to take.

Table 18: Response activities undertaken by CSOs to support beneficiaries and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic

Response activities by CSOs	Frequency	Percentage
Inform the public on risk and needed steps	63	78.8
Local data collection	4	5.0
Online counselling/ Support	4	5.0
Meeting/discussion with other CSOs	4	5.0
Relief distribution	3	3.8
Combating fake news	1	1.3
Fundraising	1	1.3
Total	80	100.0



Nearly 79% of the CSOs engaged in the activity of keeping the public informed on the risk factors and preventive etiquettes:

"People are going to market, people are sitting in vehicles and travelling but how are they sitting in the market, using their nose masks, washing their hands and what have you? So, for instance, like when the final year students got back [to school] we had to approach them and educate them on the protocols... We also have an early year programme for nursery, so KG1, KG2 so now we are engaging parents who will then, in turn, engage the children for one hour a day or 30 minutes to 45 minutes a day at home" (Kwame, a key informant).

Other activities included data collection at the local levels, counselling support, discussions with other CSOs, relief distribution and so on. It is important to mention that majority of the organisations involved in public education on the pandemic also engaged in some key service delivery activities in the form of support to vulnerable communities.

"Just two weeks ago, actually, last week, we climaxed it by donating relief items and PPEs to the communities. So, 2,000 households are benefiting from five (5) kilos of rice each and then a little of Frytol [oil]. they are also getting cake soap. We got a donation from the UK from Stevenson group; they gave us cake soap 24,000 pieces so each household is getting 10 pieces so you know when they put one there, the household will use one for like a week" (Kwame).

This shows that organisations have been busy in their support for the public in dealing with the pandemic. In the Afrikids example quoted above, the households in the beneficiary communities also benefited from hand washing materials, facemasks, and sanitisers. At the time of the interview, Kwame's organisation had distributed some 50,000 pieces of facemasks and bottles of hand sanitisers to the community people and the CHPS Compounds.

In a related development, within the WASH sector, CSOs were found collaborating with local governments:

"...the WASH sector, I think that when this pandemic started, what we tried to do was first to hold a webinar. To see what 'are our people doing' because everything was silent. And then the issue of collaboration came out very strongly that as WASH, we had to work together with other NGOs, the districts, and key ministries" (Ama, FGD participant).

The CSOs collaborated with these other institutions to educate the people on handwashing and the use of face masks as well as health and hygiene education.

According to many of the experts interviewed, despite stakeholder's collective appreciation and understanding of the impact of COVID-19, the response from the government, the private sector, and civil society sector were all happening largely independent of each other. This inadequate coordination and collaboration between and among stakeholders in the implementation of COVID-19 response measures were recognised by WACSI and STAR-Ghana as affecting the effectiveness of the responses to curb COVID-19 and its associated impact on the nation. Thus, towards strengthening the

efficacy of Ghana's response through the enhancement of stakeholder's learning, coordination, and collaboration, WACSI in partnership with STAR-Ghana Foundation organised a multi-stakeholder engagement to scale-up and strengthen efforts to fight against COVID-19 in Ghana. The meeting which was under the theme: "Sharing Lessons, Promoting Collaboration and Visioning a Future with COVID-19" drew key and influential leaders from the government, private sector, civil society and the media to discuss key lessons learnt in Ghana's response to the pandemic.

4.3.5 Lessons Learnt from the adaptation strategies and opportunities for CSOs

CSOs drew a couple of lessons from the pandemic and the strategies that had to be adopted in dealing with the challenges. These lessons came from both their individual and collaborative efforts during the pandemic.

At the individual level, many organisations realised they could still be responsible and produce results while still staying with their families. Although working from home had its challenges, the fact that CSOs tested it, is a positive thing that many of the participants pointed out.

The pandemic also compelled CSOs to find alternative ways of staying together, of communicating and working. Significantly, for those CSOs at the grassroot level who for years thought that there was no way they could impact their communities without directly getting in touch with them, had to change at some point and adopt innovative ways of sending information to their beneficiaries. For many of these organisations, they reported a certain self-awareness that has been occasioned by the COVID-19 situation.

Others have learnt lessons from their collaborative energies. Reference was made by many of the participants to what the sector has been able to achieve under the leadership of the STAR-Ghana Foundation. One of the participants made a profound statement about lessons of the sector's organisations from the COVID-19 pandemic: It made all of us realise that we are as vulnerable as the people we serve. Let me explain that. When we say we are as vulnerable as the people we serve, what it means is that all the resources that we get to do our work, are not within our reach and so the person who gives the resources;

"if that person is affected and says sorry, then the person you're trying to help, if you don't take care,

you'll compete with that same person for survival"
(Santa, a key informant).

Many lessons have been learnt from the effects of the pandemic. Another participant shared the following lesson during the focus group discussion:

"CSOs worry about sustainability, particularly because we don't pay much attention to making our services and activities visible locally. Our projects used to have the same problem, we keep talking about the need to raise local funds, but we don't pay much attention to making our organisation and our services visible locally. So, the funds were not coming but I think as we kept interacting and participating in WACSI training workshops and stuff, we have been able to come up with a plan that is helping us with our local visibility and I think that has also, to a large extent, contributed to the funds we were able to realise locally during this period" (Janis, FGD participant).

The executive director of another NGO shared lessons his organisation has taken from the pandemic and how it has affected their work:

Internal fundraising was not a major thing in us, we are learning a lot from this process and going forward, it is going to affect the next strategy that we coming to come out with (Asa, FGD participant).

There appeared to be a lot of consensus at the discussion that the COVID-19 pandemic had taught the civil society sector a lot of lessons about their individual and collective survival. It also proved to many of these organisations that they could achieve more than they have done over the years.

4.4. CSOs' Perception of Challenges and Opportunities Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

The data reveals that participating CSOs are presently concerned about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their own survival as organisations. When asked to describe how long they believed their existing resources could sustain their organisations, a significant majority of the respondents indicated their organisations could only survive on their current resources for up to six (6) months **(See Table 19).**

Table 19: Description of how long the CSOs can sustain their organisation and operations with their existing resources

Months	Frequency	Percentage
1-3 months	26	31.3
3-6 months	22	26.5
7-9 months	12	14.5
9-12 months	13	15.7
Above 12 months	10	12.0
Total	83	100.0

As seen in Table 19, only 12% of the CSOs are confident about sustaining their organisations and programmes beyond 12 months. An overwhelming majority of respondents in this study agree to the assertion that CSOs in the country feel distressed about their long-term sustainability. In Table 20, it could be observed that well over 84% of the respondents share the view that CSOs feel distressed.

Table 20: CSOs agreement with the statement that CSOs in Ghana feel distressed over their long-term sustainability

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	8	9.5
Disagree	3	3.6
Neither disagree nor agree	2	2.4
Agree	39	46.4
Strongly agree	32	38.1
Total	84	100.0

The widespread belief of practitioners in the civil society space is that the COVID-19 pandemic will affect the overall sustainability of the civil society sector in Ghana. The survey data in Table 21 reveals that nearly 90% of respondents share in this belief:

Table 21: Extent to which CSOs believe the COVID-19 will affect the overall sustainability of the CSO sector in Ghana

Response	Frequency	Percentage
To a very high extent	40	46.5
To a high extent	37	43.0
Neutral	7	8.1
To a low extent	1	1.2
To a very low extent	1	1.2
Total	86	100.0

Some of these concerns were shared during the expert interviews as well. Santa, who is the executive head of CSO in Northern Ghana and a key informant in this study shared strongly in the views expressed by the survey participants:

"If we can close down our offices, just because a pandemic has occurred and prevailing for just five to six months, and we can't manage it then it should tell you the kind of civil society space that we have. It has also exposed the low capacity we have within civil society space to respond to emergencies. We are very procedural, highly systematic, but lack the creativity to respond to emergencies and this has been exposed by the pandemic" (Santa, a key informant).

Many organisations were and remain in distress. As Santa and other experts noted during the interviews, the temptation was to think that every CSO that closed during the pandemic was working remotely but the reality was that some had shut down. The following quote summarises this claim:

"COVID has shrunk the space of civil society organisation especially, those still emerging. I know a number of organisations in the Northern Region or northern sector who have folded up; they have virtually closed their offices. So, it is not like they are working from home. It is like there is nothing to be done" (Santa, a key informant).

The above notwithstanding, participants made it clear that the pandemic has provided a certain awakening for civil society. The sector is appears to be introspectively asking the difficult questions in all its engagements and looking for ways to stay relevant and ultimately sustainable.

While many reports acknowledge that there cannot be any effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic without the active participation of civil society organisations (see for example Rick, 2020; WACSI, 2020f), as the report here typifies, the government's response to the pandemic in Ghana failed to involve or recognise the significant roles played by CSOs during such emergencies. It is, however, significant to mention that despite what was happening,

and the concerns expressed above, CSOs in Ghana did not cower from the fight against the spread and impact of the pandemic.

The CSOs through individual and collaborative efforts continued to work to take back their space. Particularly worthy of note is the fact that the sector's organisations were found to be recreating their spaces and making sure that they were heard. In this respect, CSOs in the country held a lot of webinars, seminars, and engaged in many other activities together to ensure that the constituencies they support continue to get what was rightfully theirs from the state. An example worthy of note is WACSI's monthly regional Webinar Series held under the COVID-19 series of West Africa Policy Dialogue Series (WAC-PODIS).

The policy dialogues dealt with important issues like the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on CSOs, the closing civic space in West Africa, and safeguarding citizens' electoral mandate in West Africa in a pandemic among many other important issues (WACSI, 2020b; 2020c). At these discussions, the threat of the pandemic to health, rights, the civic space, and the democratic process were assessed with proposals on what the responses of stakeholders should be for an efficient post pandemic recovery.





5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS





5.1 Summary of the Key Research Findings

The findings show that the impact of the pandemic on CSOs in Ghana has been dramatic in the short term and is expected to have some medium to long term effects on the sector's organisations.

The greatest impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector came from the COVID-19 inspired legislations and its associated measures such as lockdowns, social distancing, ban on public gatherings introduced by the government to curb the spread of the virus. The interventions, precautions, and response measures resulted in some curtailment of the operations and programmes of CSOs all through the country. The imposition of restrictions in the form of lockdowns implied that many CSOs in the affected regions could not effectively function from their offices or engage with beneficiary communities. As such, key among the impacts of the pandemic on CSOs' operations were restrictions on staff movement, reduced staff strength, cancellation of meetings, conferences, and travels (both local and international), reduction or cancellation of operations, cessation of fieldwork and community engagements, as well as the loss of funding.

Also, the funding landscape of the CSOs was largely impacted by the pandemic. Some 81% of the sampled CSOs reported among other things, delayed or reduced funding from donors and funding restrictions and related constraints as key impacts of the pandemic on their organisational funding. On the positive side, some 18% of the organisations reported that the pandemic provided them with opportunities for mobilising domestic resources. Of all the CSOs in this study however, only 32% were able to raise some domestic resources during the period. While the pandemic is affecting CSOs and funder relations, there has not been any absolute funding

withdrawal of funding for the majority (65%) of the CSOs in Ghana. What happened mainly in the Ghanaian case has been a reduction in funding amounts and a reallocation of available resources.

Regarding the impact of the pandemic on CSOs' role and relationship with stakeholders, nearly half of participants' organisations were unlikely to continue to provide services to their beneficiaries if the present conditions persisted beyond eight more weeks.

While the pandemic has deepened collaboration among CSOs, the same cannot be said of the collaboration between the sector and the state. Nearly in all the initiatives by the government aimed at containing and managing the spread of the pandemic, in the initial stages, CSOs' involvement and participation was to a large extent limited. However, given the concerns raised by a section of CSOs, there have been some form of consultations albeit to a large extent 'superficial in nature'. Notwithstanding the limited consultation of CSOs, they have on their own created a niche and made sure their presence and relevance continues to be felt.

The above finding raises a lot of questions about the value and contributions of civil society to the development of the country and whether this is truly recognised beyond the usual political rhetoric. It appears CSOs' contributions in particular to policy formulation, effective implementation, and monitoring, and to the general wellbeing of society has not been well conceptualised to guide government decisions. While civil society might be doing a lot, its contributions are not documented in a way that makes it difficult for governments to ignore or fail to see clearly the benefit of engaging and supporting the sector.



Notwithstanding the challenges, there were noteworthy responses from the civil society sector to mitigate the ravaging impact of the pandemic on their operations, programmes, and community of beneficiaries. The measures and mechanisms employed included reduction in programmes and services, reliance on digital technologies for meeting and convening, cut in administrative expenses, and reliance on organisational reserves.

In dealing with the effects on funding, many had to refocus ongoing projects and cut down on administrative activities and travel expenses. Another strategy albeit among the minority of organisations was a resort to local resource mobilisation through innovative approaches like the VSLA vehicle and other social entrepreneurial projects.

The organisations strived to ensure that they kept their significance with stakeholders. They continued to engage in advocacy and community education during the pandemic. There have also been efforts in data gathering and information sharing with stakeholders, coordination of donations for the vulnerable and the provision of capacity building services to stakeholders and beneficiary communities.

Without a doubt, CSOs drew many lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. It has exposed CSOs quite uniquely to their weaknesses and strengths and provided a certain sense of reawakening for the sector. The pandemic also provided the sector's organisations with opportunity for deep introspection and an awakening to the many other ways that civic space might be closing in Ghana.

5.2 Implications of the Research Findings for Policy and Practice

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations are important for research, policy, and practice:

1. There should be CSO representation in the development and implementation of all social interventions in the country. Any social intervention policy lacking the input of civil society could not be said to have been properly developed. There should be a way to write this into some law of a sort to guide government's behaviour in future emergencies.
2. There is an urgent need to invest in research and documentation. As was made clear in this report, CSOs in Ghana have done a lot but lack sufficient documentary proof of their work with which to support their advocacy. Deliberately investing more resources into research and documentation will ensure that the collective relevance of the sector is appreciated by all stakeholders.
3. Investment and capacity development in digital technology solutions. Individual CSOs must set some money aside to adopt and improve upon technological infrastructure to support their operations. WACSI and Techsoup can lead the charge in building the capacity of the sector's organisations in Ghana regarding the use of digital technologies to facilitate the effective delivery of their projects and programmes.
4. Diversification of financial resources and enhancement of capacity for local resource mobilization. CSOs should come out with innovative ways of raising more resources to support their operations. Those with viable projects could consider social entrepreneurship as a key to financial emancipation in the sector.
5. CSOs should enhance the quality of service delivery, share results on impact and work consciously on their visibility to court the support of their communities.
6. CSOs should form alliances with other organisations in the sector and the private sector for purposes of pooling resources together to sustain their operations in times of difficulties.

7. There will be the need for CSOs to build financial reserves from windfalls for uncertain times.
8. Under the leadership of WACSI and STAR-Ghana, the sector's organisations must work together to increase their influential power. This will require persistent productivity in the things they do as organisations and a deliberate sharing of their delivery reports.
9. CSOs should work on enhancing their image in the society through a commitment to peer and downward accountability. The organisations must engage in a constant practice of accounting to beneficiaries on their stewardship especially regarding financial resources they receive in their name. When this is done, CSOs will be seen as trusted advocates worthy of local support.

5.3 CSOs' View on Support Needed from Donors (Bilateral and Multilateral), National Governments, INGOs, Corporate Organisations and Peer CSOs

1. The organisations will require the support of donors in acquiring IT infrastructure and other digital technologies to support the effective implementation of remote working policies. They also look forward to being given the necessary training and capacity development in the use of these technologies.
2. WACSI should commit to providing capacity through training and mentorship for the CSOs especially those at the community level. This capacity enhancement will ensure that the organisations are equipped with the requisite knowledge to better manage their resources and engage their communities of beneficiaries.
3. Donors and development partners should dedicate some resources to building institutional capacity to withstand turbulent times.
4. CSOs should accept the responsibility to make their activities much more visible at the community level for easy accountability and appreciation.
5. Also, they should resort to building sustainable social enterprises to support external funding opportunities in addition to local fundraising campaigns.



6. It is recommended that the government of Ghana provides support for the sector's organisations through the provision of the required personal protective equipment (PPEs) for CSOs who may not be able to afford them during the COVID-19 pandemic.
7. The government through partnerships and collaboration could be providing indirect support for the core operations of the CSOs.
8. The citizenry should eschew the habit of only receiving from CSOs and consciously give to support the work of the civil society in their communities. They are also encouraged to adopt the acquire the habit of formal volunteerism and also own CSOs' initiatives at the community level to enhance the sustainability of those projects.
9. Academics and members of the research community should consider volunteering their know-how in capacity building and awareness creation for CSOs in their respective communities. They could also collaborate with CSOs to conduct cutting edge research and come up with sound policy recommendations for the sector.

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